Wisconsin Women's Council

Feature Article Series
September 2005

The 2005 Feature Article Series celebrates and recognizes the role of women in transforming Wisconsin's social and economic climate and improving the status of women across the state.

From the Pages of a Wisconsin Author: Looking at the Past with an Eye on the Future

by Ann Bausum

Ann Bausum is the author of With Courage and Cloth: Winning the Fight for a Woman's Right to Vote *(National Geographic Society: 2004), named Jane Addams Children's Book Award Winner of 2004 as the best book for older readers at promoting peace, justice, and equality, and a Best Book for Young Adults by the American Library Association, among other awards.*

History matters. Even as a young girl, history mattered to me. I'm sure it helped that I grew up in a Southern town where history seemed to have happened on every corner, or at least where those who made it were buried or commemorated at every turn and fairway. Whenever I walked to school, roller skated alone, or played with friends, I crossed paths trod by Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Matthew Fontaine Maury, George Patton, and George C. Marshall.

Only with time did I observe that it was men—not men *and* women—who dominated this local plane of history, as well as most of the stories in my history books. It's no wonder then that, when as a young teen I met Alice Paul, the encounter made a lasting impression upon me. My father, himself a historian, introduced us by noting that Alice Paul had fought for women to have the right to vote. Here was a female rival for the male figures of my youth.

This meeting and my fragmentary knowledge of the history associated with Alice Paul remained dormant in my mind in the decades that followed. I grew up, finished college, married, began a career in public relations (where I was able to practice my interest in writing), and took time off from work to start a family. Then, as the brain is good at doing, my memory of Alice Paul returned at an opportune time and in a new form: as an idea for a book of children's history. By then I had combined the careers of writing and stay-at-home mom, and already I had several books on their way to publication.

Thus was born *With Courage and Cloth: Winning the Fight for a Woman's Right to Vote* (National Geographic Society: 2004). After writing two books about men, I relished the chance to learn more about the role of women in U.S. history. In addition, I was eager to fill in gaps I knew still remained in the history books read by young people today.

It's easy enough to note in a textbook that "women earned the right to vote with the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920." But it's another thing to discover that women fought 72 years for this right, that generations of mothers, daughters, and granddaughters were required to complete the task, that women collaborated *and* disagreed during their quest, that they protested, suffered, and went to jail for their cause. The more celebrated 19th century figures from the struggle—including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucy Stone—were dead and gone before their life's work was achieved. The honor of completing the task goes to women whose names are not nearly so well known and who are not as celebrated, including the figure Alice Paul.

Alice Paul led the most militant activities of the fight for woman suffrage during the final years of the campaign. Her National Woman's Party suffragists picketed the Woodrow Wilson White House beginning in 1917 and endured police brutality, jailing, hunger strikes, forced-feedings, and the violation of their civil rights in the months and years that followed. This army of activists (which numbered in the thousands) rallied behind a purple, gold, and white banner designed by Alice Paul—purple for justice, white for purity of purpose, and gold for courage. Behind this standard they marched on Capitol Hill, picketed at political conventions, and gathered to protest the hypocrisy of a nation claiming to fight for democracy abroad during World War I while denying full voting rights to half its citizens at home. Hundreds of these protesters were jailed on trumped-up charges, creating further embarrassment over time for the Wilson government.

The National Woman's Party contributions to voting rights are conspicuously absent from most accounts of suffrage history. Perhaps their methods were viewed as too radical, their treatment by government authorities as too shameful, or their independence and courage as too daring to record. History books are more generous in their coverage of the work of the less militant women who labored for woman suffrage at the same time. These women rallied behind the leadership of Carrie Chapman Catt and the National American Woman's Suffrage Association (NAWSA), a group with ties to the suffrage luminaries from the 19th century. (The League of Women Voters would eventually emerge from NAWSA's ashes after voting rights were won.)

Through NAWSA, Carrie Chapman Catt marshaled an even larger force than Paul's that was dedicated to bringing votes to women. With as many as two million members, NAWSA supported passage of an amendment to the U.S. Constitution. At the same time members campaigned for improvement of their state suffrage rights. As of 1900 only four states (the sparsely populated Western states of Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and Idaho) offered their female citizens the right to vote. Not until 1910 did another state joint this tally, Washington, followed a year later by California and, in 1912, by Kansas, Arizona, and Oregon. Each of these gains represented the result of decades-long, exhausting campaign efforts. In 1916 Carrie Chapman Catt constructed a "Winning Plan" for bringing suffrage to more states while also supporting passage of a federal amendment. The pressure of this cascading growth in state rights helped fuel support for the national cause.

Although NAWSA's efforts were not as dramatic or confrontational as the work of the National Woman's Party, it was the combined pressure of these two groups, working in tandem but not in concert, that helped turn the tide in favor of votes for women. Their parallel efforts persisted through the passage of the 19th Amendment by the U.S. Senate in 1919 (after four failed attempts) and by the U.S. House of Representatives (which first approved it earlier that year), and by the 14-month-long battle for ratification that followed. Our own Wisconsin earned the distinction of ratifying the amendment first, on June 20, 1919. My home state of Tennessee provided the winning 26th vote of approval on August 18, 1920. The amendment became law on August 26, 1920, just 85 years ago.

We must mark the fact that women gained the right to vote so recently. The events of 1920 survive in living memory. Even I, at midlife, can recall shaking the hand of the equivalent of one of our founding mothers, a woman who helped her sex attain the beginnings of equality almost 150 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Yet even this triumph in 1920 had a hollow ring of victory, for the record shows that another 45 years were required to secure voting rights for most African American women (as well as men).

Alice Paul, just 35 years old in 1920, devoted the rest of her life toward furthering the rights of women. In 1923 she wrote what is known today as the equal rights amendment (ERA). She died in 1977 at the age of 92 predicting that the ERA, which passed Congress in 1970, would fail to be ratified by the various states. Her prediction has yet to be proven wrong.

History matters. It offers cause for celebrations, such as the commemoration of the 85th anniversary on August 26. And it provides a measuring rod for achievements yet to come. By writing with young readers in mind, I try to honor both of these dimensions: to help young people see the paths that brought them to the present and to inspire them to blaze ahead into the future.

About the Author

Ann Bausum grew up in Lexington, Virginia, and met Wisconsin by attending Beloit College. After her graduation in 1979, she moved to New York City, but Wisconsin became her home again beginning in 1981. She, her husband, and two sons, live in Beloit, Wisconsin.

Other books by Bausum include *Dragon Bones and Dinosaur Eggs: A Photo-biography of Explorer Roy Chapman Andrews* (National Geographic: 2000), and *Our Country's Presidents* (National Geographic: 2001, 2005). Her latest book, *Freedom Riders: John Lewis and Jim Zwerg on the Front Lines of the Civil Rights Movement* will be published in January 2006 by National Geographic.

Bausum's books have won numerous awards. *With Courage and Cloth* was named the Jane Addams Children's Book Award Winner of 2004 as the best book for older readers at promoting peace, justice, and equality. It was named a Notable Book by

the American Library Association, and it made “best book” lists with School Library Journal, the New York Public Library, the Chicago Public Library, the Wisconsin Library Association, the Council for Wisconsin Writers, and the Cooperative Children’s Book Center (University of Wisconsin), among others.

Two of Bausum’s books have featured Wisconsin figures: the explorer Roy Chapman Andrews (a Beloit native) and Freedom Rider Jim Zwerg (born in Appleton). Both, like Bausum, are graduates of Beloit College.

For more information on Ann Bausum and her books, visit her web site at: http://www.annbausum.com.

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and promotes unique partnerships to address issues affecting Wisconsin women.

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